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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9242
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RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 001087

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TAGS: [EUN](#) [GR](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: GREEK VIEWS ON BEST APPROACH TO SYRIA

REF: A. SECSTATE 71071
[1](#)B. ATHENS 1022

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHARLES RIES. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) On May 24, A/Polcouns delivered ref a demarche on Syria's sham presidential referendum to Deputy Director of the Greek MFA A-6 Division for Middle East Affairs Giorgos Ayfantis. Ayfantis promised to inform his superiors of the U.S. position, though he said Greece took another view of the best way to approach the issue. While Greece wished to see the democratization of Syria as soon as possible, it saw Assad as the best of the many current bad options. The alternative now to Assad, argued Ayfantis, was not democracy but the Muslim Brotherhood. Nevertheless, Ayfantis said the EU had criticized the Syrian election procedure, and he did not exclude the possibility that it would do so again as a matter of principle.

[1](#)2. (C) Ayfantis said FM Dora Bakoyannis would include Syria in her upcoming June visit to the Middle East, which would also include stops in Egypt, Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon. In Syria, she would explore several issues. One was Syria's policy in Lebanon. This was of interest because of the EU role in UNIFIL, but also because of a potential Syria-Lebanon route for oil from Mesopotamia, since Greece -- and the EU -- did not want to be overly dependent on Russian oil and the Persian Gulf was becoming less stable. While Bakoyannis did not intend to discuss oil directly, she would ask many questions and her point would be obvious to Assad -- "a very intelligent man."

[1](#)3. (C) On the democracy issue, Bakoyannis intended to warn Assad against Syria becoming a "lonely rider." She would advocate he jettison his old guard and bring in younger, more outward-looking cadres. Ayfantis noted that EU High Representative Solana would also be traveling to Syria shortly and would deliver a similar message.

[1](#)4. (C) Finally, during her Middle East trip Bakoyannis would also try to deal with the leadership crisis in the Jerusalem Patriarchate of the Greek Orthodox Church (ref b). She had not secured an audience with the King of Jordan, who was key to defusing the crisis. Nevertheless, she needed to do what she could, Ayfantis explained, because of the great symbolic and religious importance of the Patriarchate for Greece.
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